

Woman of the month Karen Kornbluh
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Q. Could you tell us about your career path?

My most interesting job before this one was serving as Policy Director for then-Senator Barack Obama. I also had the privilege of writing the 2008 Democratic Party Platform. During the Clinton Administration, I was Deputy Chief of Staff at the U.S. Treasury Department; and Director of the Federal Communication Commission's Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs. My first jobs were as an economic forecaster and management consultant to US manufacturing companies.

In between my time at Treasury and working for Barack Obama, I spent some time writing at a "think tank" called the America Foundation. There, I founded the Work and Family Program and was also a Markle Technology Policy Fellow. I published articles in publications like The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Atlantic Monthly.

Q. What is your role at the OECD?

I represent the United States to the organization, serving on its Council which works with the Secretary General to set the organization's direction. We have over 1000 US government officials who participate in the OECD work of developing guidelines and recommendations so my office also works with them as they do their work.

Q. What is the place of women in the OECD policies?

When I arrived at the OECD, I knew of some fantastic work the organization had done -- one book "Babies and Bosses" was particularly good in terms of what needs to be done to help parents manage competing responsibilities at work and home. But there was not any major work -- no cross-cutting project like there was on innovation or green growth. The last gender declaration from the OECD was in 1980. The Initiative creates a knowledge network to gather pertinent data, share best practices and ensure future action. We felt that the organization could play a major role in saying that women's economic opportunity is critical to economic growth.

Q. What is the Gender Initiative?

The Gender Initiative launched at the 50th Anniversary Ministerial chaired by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The United States had asked the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development to launch its Gender Initiative which will focus its economic lens on recommending policy solutions and identifying the barriers to greater gender equality in education, employment and entrepreneurship. With political and financial leadership from the United States, it will provide families, businesses, economists, and policymakers with comparative knowledge about gender gaps, while providing a tool box of effective policies with which to diminish disparities.

The OECD is running a pilot project in the Middle East and North Africa called the Women's Business Forum which I co-chair with the Jordanian Ambassador. It works with women and

business in the Middle East to help them develop more skills and more opportunities and a better network.

Q. Did being a woman help you or not? Why?

Well it's hard to know! I do know that I would not have re-created my career after my Clinton Administration jobs if I did not want to slow down to spend more time with my children -- but that gave me the opportunity to write and think about something important -- how families are faring in the new global economy and how we can make life easier for parents.

Q. What advice would you give to better balance professional life and private life?

I think the most important lesson is to try to forgive yourself -- it's very hard to fulfill your responsibilities at work the way you did before kids and feel that you are spending enough time with your kids at the same time. You won't do it perfectly -- and it's so easy to feel guilty at work and at home even though you're doing your best. One way to feel less guilty is to realize that it doesn't all have to balance every day. Some people I know work hard for part of the year but have an arrangement where they can take off the whole summer with their children. Other people I know work a 4-day week. I have taken time away from the workplace, like many people I know, and then gone back. For me, having dinner with my kids is extremely important - even if I have to go online afterwards. But you have to find out what is most important to your kids and to you at different points in their development and your career. It's not easy!

Q. How could men be better included in family life?

Men could really be the answer to the work-family dilemma. If men start to take time off for a new baby, or to pick kids up, then it will make it more acceptable and businesses will realize this is just a responsibility that their workers have that must be accommodated. Right now its costs to one's career to be the one who cuts back to care for the kids -- and therefore many families decide that the mother will become the main parent and the father the main worker. The workplace and attitudes have to change so that we don't think less of workers who have family responsibilities. Then, hopefully, fathers will be able to spend more time with their kids while mothers make fewer career sacrifices.

Q. What lessons can we learn from other countries on this subject?

The U.S. asked the OECD to do a project looking at what different countries are doing, what companies are doing and to provide what we call a tool box, different ideas that work and some analysis of why. I'm very interested in learning more about the French childcare system, the Scandinavian approach to paternity leave, how different forms of childcare tax credits or other family-oriented tax credits work. The OECD recommends childcare instead of child tax credits and the analysis will be interesting to see.

Q. What do you think about the situation of women in the world today?

There is broad consensus that when women prosper, their children prosper, communities are stronger and economies are more productive. Millennium Development Goal 3 -- the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women -- is recognized as key to the achievement of all the other MDGs. Yet, today women make up only 30 percent of the world's

formal workforce, earn 10 percent of the world's income and own only 1 percent of the world's property. Of 1.2 billion people living in poverty worldwide, fully 70 percent are women. In many cases, women took the brunt of the economic crisis.

Q. What would be the ideal future?

I'll just quote President Barack Obama, who said, "We all want our daughters to have the same opportunities as our sons."

Thank you!